

Interview with Thomas J. Evans
Conducted by Janet Tener for the
Providence District History Project Providence Perspective
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Linda: Good morning we're here in office of Providence District Supervisor Dr. Linda Smyth who has a PHD in American History and has had the inspirational idea of trying to capture some of the rich history of the Providence District and surrounding area. My name is Janet Tener, I'm a resident of Oakton, Virginia and today, January 30, 2008, I have the pleasure of interviewing Mr. Tom Evans long time area resident and historian. Mr. Evans can you start by giving us your full name and where you live?

Tom: Yes, My name is Thomas J. Evans and I live off Hunters Mill Road, [a] Vienna address but I actually live in Hunters Mill.

Janet: Have you lived at that location for quite a while?

Tom: 33 years.

Janet: 33 years.

Tom: Yes.

Janet: Okay and how is it that you came to the area to begin with?

Tom: Well I worked for the Department of the Army and we came up from Hampton, Virginia, and decided that since I was going to work in Washington, we wanted to kind of live out in the country. And so we had checked the schools and everything looked good and then suddenly the Realtor came up with Hunters Mill. And of course I said is that where the Battle of Hunters Mill took place? Well she didn't know, but I knew and so Hunters Mill is where we decided to settle.

Janet: Lovely, how was it that you knew about Hunters Mill at that point in time?

Tom: Well the Battle of Hunters Mill is I think not widely known but well known that there was such a battle took place early in the war. One of the very earliest war battles Hunters Mill.

Janet: Did you study this or was the study of the Civil War an avocation for you or a professional interest?

Tom: A hobby really and I wrote, I started writing in high school through college, it was just a great interest of mine. My father was a Spanish American War Veteran and even as a kid I would go around to these various meetings they had. And of course in those days there were also Civil War Veterans that were still alive.

Janet: Um hum.

Tom: And I would just listen to these huge tales and also some very good stories. A lot of these appeared in some of my books and articles that I have written over the years.

Janet: What do you consider your favorite works that you've authored?

Tom: I think Mosby's Confederacy Tour Book is one of the favorite. Jim Moyer and I got together on this. Jim was writing on the railroads and I was writing on Civil War and Virgil Carrington Jones the great author had us doing his tours; and he said you two need to get together and write a book. He says or unless when we all die he says, there won't be any record of this. So we went through Northern Virginia here and of course we got a lot of Hunters Mill, got some Huntermillness, and we did this book. I think it has been very well received and I think that the kids like it because it has a lot of pictures in it.

Janet: What do you consider if we go back to that period or even beyond, what do you consider were the factors that led to the importance of the

Hunter Mill corridor Hunter Mill Road and in its later the contentiousness that later ensured during the Civil War. Why was it even valuable to anyone at that point in time?

Tom: Hunter's Mill Road was the way you would want to go to get North or South. And then the railroad came through from Vienna where the 22nd Calvary Brigade, the North's 22nd Calvary Brigade, would be and they crossed right at Hunter's Mill. And so consequently we had people going to Antietam, to Gettysburg all of these both north and south coming up either the road or the railroad; and they came or ran through what today is Hunter's Mill.

Janet: And what was the name of the railroad that crossed there?

Tom: I believe at that time it was known as the Alexandria and Leesburg; it's the W&OD Trail now.

Janet: Okay. And so was it primarily used to convey goods from farms or for people to travel on or was it primarily a military railroad?

Tom: No, it was for the farmers originally but at the beginning of the Civil War we had two bridges between Hunters Mill and Vienna and those were burned and tracks were taken out; and consequently Vienna became the end of the rails all during the Civil War. The roadbed was there and it was easier to take horses and guns up a finished rail road bed than it would have been to travel through the country.

Janet: When the railroad was disabled was that as a result of Confederate action or Union?

Tom: Both I think.

Janet: Oh really, uh huh and at that point in time did the road then become the main way of transporting things, Hunter Mill Road itself, or how did the breaking up of the railroad impact the use of the road itself?

Tom: Well actually I think there was more traffic of course going on now that the railroad couldn't exist. Actually Vienna was about the stopping point; as soon as you left Vienna and started coming up Hunter's Mill they had picket posts up there.

Janet: Oh.

Tom: Really that was about the extent of the union occupation at that time early in the war.

Janet: If we rewind a little bit to the earliest weeks and months of the war at what point in time did Hunter Mill Road end or the railroad come into contention?

Tom: I can't think of the date but the very first time the ah, what resulted in the Battle of Hunter's Mill it was after the Battle of Dranesville. And the North wanted to see what was the shape of the railroad and they came down from the Dranesville area, came down what was left of the railroad. And they ran into the Confederates who were occupying Hunter's Mill and this is where the Battle of Hunters Mill is. I probably have the dates in here but I can't think of it right off of the top of my head. It was very early it was the first of the war.

Janet: Okay, so tell us a little about the Battle of Hunters Mill and what the stakes really were.

Tom: Well the North was on an expedition just to see what the shape of the road was, they found the bridges had been burned. Actually the South was in there, they had a bunch of people that was I guess you would say pickets. A lot of them were up at Mrs. Brooks house. Mrs. Brooks was an excellent cook. So a lot of them were laying around the yard up at Mrs. Brooks' when the Federals sort of surprised them. So they got into a

pitched Calvary battle that lasted all through the area. I don't think anybody was hurt to any great extent. I don't think anybody was even killed but a horse or two were shot and a couple of people were wounded.

But Harpers Weekly has a picture of it and it shows it and boy it looks like Gettysburg, you know, with people charging and all this. But it wasn't that it was just a very minor skirmish. But it's the Battle of Hunters Mill and we're proud of it.

Janet: (Laughing.) And this would have been in 1861 or 62?

Tom: I believe it's 62.

Janet: 62 okay.

Tom: But it was no, no it could have been 61. I could look it up here I've got it but it was right at the beginning of the war.

Janet: So early in the war.

Tom: Um hum, it was the first one.

Janet: And then the Federal troops, did they give up and retreat somewhat closer to Vienna or Fairfax?

Tom: No, they pulled back to Dranesville.

Janet: They pulled back to Dranesville? So they went back the way they had come rather than trying to circumvent?

Tom: Right.

Janet: In the area of Flint Hill which is the name that Oakton was formally known by what kind of activity was going on there?

Tom: General ah - the South came in I can't think of - General Boulin had his headquarters there and there is also some extensive trenches up around where the church is now.

Janet: The Methodist United Methodist Church?

Tom: Yes, it was all occupied after the first Battle of Manassas; the Confederates came in and occupied this whole area.

Janet: And what was the impact would you say on the local residents? I mean did they flee, did they stay, did they try to help one side or the other?

Tom: We were pretty much split out there between the Union and Confederate sympathizers even though they voted for succession here it was greatly split and we changed occupation some ten times in that area.

Janet: Oh my gosh, ten times.

Tom: Yes.

Janet: So that must have been extremely difficult on the people.

Tom: It was, it was and I think our DVD pretty well shows what stress it was and what it was like.

Janet: And do you mind giving the name of the DVD just for the record this is the one that was recently produced by Steve...

Tom: Yes, "Danger Between the Lines" by Steve Hull and the Hunter Mill Defense League.

Janet: Um hum, and that is available through the Hunter Mill Defense League?

Tom: Yes, um hum.

Janet: Okay. When families found that troops on either side were coming in and wanted to requisition things that they had on their local farms how did they respond?

Tom: Well there wasn't much you could really do. Sometimes they would leave payment either in Union money or in Confederate money and sometimes they just took it; and most of the time they just took it.

Janet: Um hum, and this probably laid waste to a number of farms as a result.

Tom: Oh, terrible; and then of course they had to have timber for fires and things like this so the whole area was just in very bad shape by the end of the war.

Janet: I had heard just in passing at one time that the reason there are almost no trees over 150 years old in this area is because they were chopped down during the Civil War.

Tom: That's true.

Janet: Is that your opinion as well?

Tom: That is true and I'll tell you something else; I had the pleasure of interviewing an old gentleman and I asked him what his occupation was and he said he was a willow buyer. And I said now what the world is a willow buyer? Well after the Civil War we had so many veterans without arms or legs that they would have artificial limbs and willow was the preferred wood because willow won't snap, it will twist it will not break. And so he would go to all the creeks and get the farmers and they would saw it up into links. And that's why if you look now you don't hardly ever see a willow tree along our creeks. If you get out into Indiana or Kentucky in those areas these creeks are just loaded with willows trees, but around here you hardly ever see a willow tree.

Janet: What an interesting story, I have a willow tree I'd like to donate to the cause if there's any way.

Tom and Janet: Laughing.

Janet: Do you think that one of the results of the going back and forth between the - you said the area control of the road and the railroad changed hands approximately ten times over the course of a four year war - do you think that the impact of that was to cause people just to leave the area and never return? Or did some of the families stick it out?

Tom: No, quite a few families stuck it out and surprisingly enough. I think people don't realize this - after the war there were a lot of Union Veterans that came here that really liked the area. So Mayo Stuntz had me inventory the Flint Hill cemeteries for the Virginian Room. And Jim's put it in his book here [book by James Lewis, Jr.]. But if you look at the number of Union Veterans we have buried here in the Flint Hill Cemetery. [Inventory list for Flint Hill Cemetery]

Janet: Oh my, and where exactly is the Flint Hill Cemetery located?

Tom: It's here in Oakton. If you head into Vienna it is about ¼ of a mile on the right.

Janet: Okay, is it near the Church of the Bretheran?

Tom: Yes.

Janet: That's it, okay okay so I did not realize that it went back that far.

Tom: Yes it does.

Janet: Oh yes there are I can see here about at least a dozen names. [Looking at research of those buried in Flint Hill Cemetery].

Tom: Yes and of course some of those did live here during that period too.

Janet: Oh! So neighbor turned against neighbor.

Tom: Oh, absolutely!

Janet: What are some of the more memorable; can you recall any of the families off of the top of your head, even looking at this list that, where one would have been with the Federal side and others would have been with the Confederate side?

Tom: Charlotte Smith comes to mind because her granddaughter was in the video and she married the Captain George Kenyon.

Janet: I saw

Tom: Is that in here?

Janet: He's on the – yes he's on this list of confederate

Tom: Yeah, I think there is a picture – I just had the chance to scan this so obviously I am not as up to date as I could be. But somewhere in here is Charlotte's picture and she married Captain George Kenyon who was Captain with the 50th Engineers as I recall. When I look for something I can never find it.

Janet: I understand, then would you say that or what would you say the impact was on African American residents or slaves or even free men who might have been in the area at the time of the war? Number one, were there very many to begin with; and number two, what happened to them?

Tom: Actually some of them are still in the area and of course whenever the Southerners came up they brought slaves with them.

Janet: Oh they did? Now why would they have done that?

Tom: They were body servants and we had out at Hunters Mill measles came through and we had hospital hill and the Confederates who died there were brought on into Fairfax. But the slaves we buried over on

what's called Dead Man's Hill; and there was about 10 or 11 buried on Dead Man's Hill. There was rock markers and when we came through there 33 years ago you could see it, now it's been pastured and it is pretty well knocked down. But they called it Dead Man's Hill and it is a very nice place to sled, all these kids use to go over and sled down on Dead Man's Hill. Their mother's used to ask "isn't that dangerous to go over there"? I said well actually it's not that bad, it's named Dead Man's Hill on account of the slaves that are buried on top of it.

Janet: Were, African Americans who remained or maybe even came after the war did they settle in any particular areas or neighborhoods or enclaves along Hunter Mill Road?

Tom: Yes, we have a church up there and it was given by Rosy Carter, actually she gave the land for it and we had a small settlement there but it's gone away. But we did have colored people through the area in Fairfax and I can't think of the name of the gentlemen but he's buried in Jermantown Cemetery, he was a black fellow and he drew a Confederate pension.

About once about every two or three years when I am in the area I put a Confederate flag on his grave, after drawing a pension I believe he is entitle to one.

Janet: Yes, absolutely. And so then the church that is I think currently at the crossroads of Hunters Mill Road and Sunrise Valley Drive? That is the Cartersville Baptist Church is that the land you are talking about?

Tom: Yes, I'm talking about that. She is not buried there she's buried back behind it in the subdivision over there now. The cemetery there has been paved over. So when you park your car there you are over

Janet: Holy ground, hallowed ground.

Tom: Hallowed ground.

Janet: Are on hallowed ground. But the church is still active then?

Tom: Oh yeah, yes um hum.

Janet: So the African American community draws from the area and so I assume any of those families have probably been here for a while.

Tom: I assume so. They are having some problems out there. Apparently whenever they built that subdivision they told them that they were giving them land, but nobody recorded it formally and so now they've got some problems there, which is a shame. They wanted to borrow some money to put in air conditioning I think and that's when it came to light just within the last year.

Janet: Hum. I'm curious about whether there has been any formal archeological digs of any kind along the Hunter Mill Corridor, on your property, or elsewhere?

Tom: Not to my knowledge, we have Indian Hill out there.

Janet: Indian Hill.

Tom: Indian Hill which sits up, over the creek and I'm trying to think of the name of the Fairfax County Archeologist Mike and I can't think of his name.

Janet: Oh, I know who you are talking about.

Tom: Well, I got a hold of him whenever they started to build out there because we went through there metal detecting and of course we found Union and Confederate bullets and we found arrow heads and you could see all this tremendous chips where somebody had sat there and made arrow heads. And they named it Indian Hills which makes sense.

So I got a hold of Mike and I asked him, and he said no he had been over there and that actually the camp was across Difficult Run down in the bottoms.

Janet: Oh, okay.

Tom: And he said we know about it, he says it's just another Indian camp. So my son and I had been through there and you could pick up a piece of

pottery and it wasn't good pottery but you know it was placed - but you could see where there was a big Indian camp there at one time.

Janet: Is the road essentially still the shape of Hunter Mill Road still the same as what the original Indian trail was, is that the general consensus or has it deviated significantly.

Tom: I don't know, the road has been there since Colonial times and I don't think the road itself has deviated. I don't know whether the Indians would use it as a trail or not.

Janet: Um hum. Do you know how Flint Hill got the name Flint Hill or Oakton as we call it now?

Tom: No, I don't, I don't, I know that we have another one down in Southern Virginia so that's how we lost the name.

Janet: Right, I had heard the story that the post office had already been taken.

Tom: Yes, it had already been taken. (Referring to the name Flint Hill.)

Janet: And when you look back now at the significance of the area in terms of the say region, let's say the extended from Sharpsburg or Antietam and Gettysburg and then further South to Manassas and further West to Leesburg and elsewhere. How would you say on a scale of one to five with five being highly significant and one being not so significant - How would you rate the strategic importance of the Hunter Mill Corridor or Hunter Mill Road and railroad during the early part of the Civil War?

Tom: Actually I would have to say a five.

Janet: A five?

Tom: We had Jeb Steward come up on a Christmas raid he came through there and we hit him all the way to Gettysburg. He knew the area so he came back there.

And of course we had Williams who brought his Union Division through there. Early in the war we had Meade, Org and Reynolds there as Brigadier Generals. We had other Generals through there. We had Longstreet and ah – no, I think it was very significant. If you were going north or south you had to come up one or the other. Or you would use one or the other – let's put that way.

Janet: That's very interesting and I wonder if people are aware of how strategically important it actually was.

Tom: Well, That's how we got all of these people going through there.

Janet: Um hum.

Tom: Otherwise I mean it's just a little sawmill and what importance is it? It just happens to be at the intersection of a major road and railroad and that is what made it important.

Janet: Um hum. One of the more colorful characters that we are reminded of by the names of local schools and roads and other historical markers and so forth is John Mosby. Can you tell us a little bit about his role in the area?

Tom: He controlled it, he controlled it at night; Mosby owns the night.

Janet: And he was active over what period would you say?

Tom: Actually he came in during the later days of the war he was a Stewart Scout early in the war. It was only when he did begin to get his own unit that he became involved in

Janet: In the he Mosby's Raiders they were called?

Tom: Um hum.

Janet: What was his rank and where was he from originally?

Tom: Well he was from down Southern Virginia and he started off as a Private and he ended up a Colonel and probably would have made General if the war had extended.

Janet: Why was he such a thorn in the side of the Federal Troops?

Tom: He could pretty much control the roads out here; he would attack the wagon trains, cut the telegraph wires.

Janet: So he was an early proponent of guerilla warfare?

Tom: Yes he was and very successful.

Janet: And how did he recruit his Brigade? I mean were these people assigned to him, I don't know how it worked back then, or were these people who would just say I want to join up and I want to be part of what you're doing?

Tom: Mostly that and mostly, yeah, he had a lot of 15 or 16 year olds.

Janet: Oh my gosh.

Tom: Yeah, of course he said that's why he was so successful because anybody with any sense wouldn't have did what they did.

Janet: (Laughing) And how old was he about this time would you say?

Tom: He was married and was in his late 20's when the war started.

Janet: So he was a young man and achieved the rank of Colonel fairly early was that not unusual during the Civil War?

Tom: Yes it was, but I am doing some work now and this is whatever happened to – and this is a lot of the people that Mosby had captured then and ah

Janet: Oh!! Do you want to read some of the more memorable names off to us or those that you

Tom: Alright,

Janet: researched.

Tom: this is one that I was very interested in Major Wells of the First Vermont Calvary. We know that Mosby captured him over here at Herndon railroad station. He came back into the Army; he was made – he was at the Battle of Gettysburg - big round top. He won the Medal of Honor there. He was promoted to Major General, he had entered as a Private and he left the service as a Major General at the end of the war. He became a very successful druggist and he is buried in Lake View Cemetery Vermont.

Here is a Major Forbes in Second Massachusetts Calvary who was stationed here in Vienna. He was captured outside of the Mount Zion Church. He came back and he fought and left at the rank of Lt. Colonel. He married Edith Emerson who was the daughter of Ralph Waldo Emerson.

Janet: Oh.

Tom: And he went on and he was the President of the Bell Telephone Company.

Janet: Fascinating.

Tom: So I was working on some of these names that are associated with Mosby but nobody knows what happened to them after the war.

Janet: Right.

Tom: So I thought that was interesting and that's one of my projects I am working on.

Janet: Fascinating.

Tom: But somehow you don't think that the President of Bell Telephone Company coming from - (laughing and I couldn't hear him finish)

Janet: What are some of the most interesting almost larger than life stories about Mosby and doesn't one concern his alleged capture or escape at some point from was it in Fairfax? Maybe my memory is a little off?

Tom: No it was a little bit further down but he was surrounded and he climb out the window into a big tree, which still exists down there. It is part of the tourism down there, and he escaped that way.

Janet: And where was this located?

Tom: Just outside of Middleburg.

Janet: Middleburg, okay. Was he ever captured for good? And taken out of action?

Tom: Yes he was captured at Beaver Dam and he was kept for about two months or something like that. And that was early in the war and people didn't realize what he was going to be, he was just a scout at that time.

Janet: And did he survive the whole length of the war?

Tom: Yes he did, he didn't die until 1916.

Janet: 1916 and what did he do after the war?

Tom: He was an attorney.

Janet: An attorney.

Tom: And a very successful one.

Janet. And where did he live?

Tom: He lived at Warrenton and then he was council to Hong Kong. He came back and he was in California and he was an attorney for the railroads.

Janet: Oh my gosh, so he probably died a fairly wealthy man.

Tom: No, no he was in pretty bad shape.

Janet: Oh.

Tom: Actually Major Forbes who knew the President, when Mosby was sick he helped him out it is not widely known but the Forbes family said that they did give him money.

Janet: Interesting. So as far as we know he doesn't have any family in this area?

Tom: He has some granddaughters, which I have met. And he has some others of their children but they ever really interested had much interest in Mosby. I know his grandson Admiral Colley very well; he was

Janet: I'm sorry what was his name again?

Tom: Beverly Mosby Colley he was an Admiral in the Navy and he represented the Japanese War prisoners. Of course he lost - he said it was stacked agin him. (Both laughing) But he was a tremendous fellow and it was my pleasure to know him.

Janet: And are there any other that you have come across in your research or even in person or in your research – descendants of some of the more

notable figures of the various skirmishes and battles in this area that are still here?

Tom: Yeah, there's a lot of sons, not sons - grandsons and granddaughters of various people and I meet them all the time.

Janet: You mentioned was it Charlotte Smith earlier.

Tom: Yes, ah huh.

Janet: Is she still alive?

Tom: Oh, no, no no, she died about 1914 I think. But her great granddaughter is the one who did the part on the DVD.

Janet: Oh, I see. Yes, I remember some of the letters that she was reading from her grandmother I think on the DVD's.

Tom: Well let me tell you how I got interested.

Janet: Yes!! That was on one of my questions.

Tom: I thought you would like to know. My mother was a Trosbrough and her family goes all the way back to the Revolution - but my father's family the Evans'. My grandfather Evans came over from Wales right after the end of the Civil War. He was a mines superintendent. You know all Welshmen dig coal. And he had been a politician; but he would always say get out and vote Dan. So he had a baseball team from the mines and they would go through Northern Pennsylvania. And he met a Welshman by the name of Thomas Evans and Thomas Evans had fought during the civil War and won the Medal of Honor at the Piedmont. And so whenever my grandfather started having kids he started naming them, and my father was Thomas Evans and I am a junior. Well Thomas Evans, who won the Medal of Honor was up here in Virginia and it was hot and they were out on picking duty, so there was five or six of them. So they said one of us stand up here on the bank and the others of us will get in the stream and bathe.

After a while the guy on guard says come on in there's nothing out here. So he went in. After a while they looked up and there sitting on the bank were three men on horses and one of them says I am Major Mosby and I am not here to bother you, you're having a good time but I am taking all your arms and equipment. So I looked on the Thomas Evans' on the National Archives Service Record and they charged him I think it was \$15.32 for the loss of an Infield rifle. So I heard this story all my life so that's whenever I came up this way. I met Virgil Carrington Jones, of course so that ended up we did 19 years of Mosby tours and then I turned them over and there's been eight more years so we have 27 years of Mosby tours in this area.

Janet: Wow, amazing. Tell me a little bit about some of the relics that you have come across in your research in your property, your nearby property and you said your son helped you when he was a young man growing up.

Tom: On yes we actually at Hunters Mill there's only a few very nice flat fields which were used for the drilling and things like that. But the rough areas and the hills where the people were camped and had their tents you would see these rock fire rings they still existed whenever we came out there, now this is all subdivision. But then you could see where they sat there and where if you moved back and scraped the earth off there was still charcoal left from those days. And they would leave stuff around the fire place and you know all that stuff would be lost through the camp floors and things like that. And ah, I can't say that we ever really found anything very significant but a lot of interesting little things like a diamond ring or you know or this watch.

Janet: Yeah, what where are some of the things you brought, I know you brought a number of things with you today.

Tom: Buttons and things like that, occasionally you would find a little bit of money I found a half dime and things like that.

Janet: I didn't know there was such a thing.

Tom: A fellow that was with me found a gold dollar piece but I never was that fortunate to find any gold pieces.

Janet: Have any of these items, and I am going to ask you what some of these things are, but have any of these items been on display locally or in other collections?

Tom: Well, right now we're displaying them along with the DVD. Yes they have been. And of course I contribute a lot of them to the museums. There's the Fairfax Museum, the Railroad Museum, Herndon Museum. Actually I'm tied up with the Museum in Salem, Indiana where I went to high school, they have some stuff. And my wife's from Kentucky so they have some stuff at Hodgenville there at the Abraham Lincoln Museum, mostly cannon balls and that sort of thing.

Janet: Um hum, um hum, and you just would go out with a metal detector.

Tom: Um hum.

Janet: And then or course sort of reason, okay there is a camp fire so that means tents must have been not too far away a kind of reason backwards from something? I mean how do you even approach looking for these items?

Tom: Well first you want to try and find out where somebody camped; and we were privileged to that because we knew there were 20,000 people. 20,000 soldiers came into Hunters Mill, can you imagine that?

Janet: No I cannot.

Tom: 20,000 and so when you got that many people, you know you're going to lose a lot of stuff.

Janet: (Laughing)

Tom: And then of course

Janet: If you don't get out with your hide intact, right.

Tom: Right. And then of course all during the war people came and camped and stayed, not on that magnitude. But you know the National Park Service controls the battle fields and you can't metal detect on the battle fields. Really you wouldn't find much there except fired bullets and things like that. What you want to do is pull back where people camped and this is where they lost the stuff.

Janet: Um hum and is that because oftentimes they just had to get up and pull up stakes very quickly and move because of the enemy coming or was it just because it was very hard to keep track of your stuff?

Tom: Its fair wear and tear buttons in particularly you know you could lose a button off of your uniform so easily.

Janet: Um hum and you have a number of them with you.

Tom: Yes.

Janet: And were the buttons these - oh these are beautiful buttons what are the insignias here?

Tom: Alright, these are New York State buttons we had the 13th and 16th New York in there as the Picket Post out there.

Janet: Oh!

Tom: And ah let's see.

Janet: And these are all brass?

Tom: Yes those are brass buttons.

Janet: Beautiful.

Tom: Now this is a Confederate flower button, North Carolina.

Janet: North Carolina. And what is this item right here?

Tom: This is off of a saddle it is a saddle plate the maker put the saddle plate and it was made for somebody from Baltimore so obviously it is a confederate saddle. And you see this buckshot with a tooth mark in it.

Janet: Yes.

Tom: That is why you want to watch whenever your ha ha ha.

Janet: And I noticed that you have in one of your collections, I don't know is it here today where the expression "bite the bullet" comes from?

Tom: Yes um hum it is right here; can you see the teeth marks on that one?

Janet: Can you see this Linda? We have with us today Linda Byrne who is an Assistant to Supervisor Linda Smyth and she is participating observing the interview. What would have been the circumstance of the creation of this bullet with teeth marks in it?

Tom: Well if you are hurt badly and somebody's trying to give you help it's good to bite on something and so there is the term bite the bullet and so that was done.

Janet: And were the bullets all lead, what were they made out of?

Tom: Yes, they are lead, they are soft lead bullets and there are a variety of them, there must be 200 or 300 different type of bullets. Mostly there are two ring Confederate and three ring Union so we can pretty much tell. But a lot of them use the same bullets early in the war so it is very hard to tell. Let me look. See I've got so many things out here at Hunters Mill that I have trouble keeping up with the dates but after October 20, 1861 this is the one the Battle at Hunters Mill that took place so it was

Janet: Oh so very early, just four months after first Manassas.

Tom: Yeah, that was our first one that was our big one – we're proud of it.

Janet: And how many individuals do you think were involved in that?

Tom: Let's see, there were about 50 of the Union and probably somewhere around 20 or 25 Confederates, I don't know.

Janet: And were they largely on foot or on horseback.

Tom: No, they were on horse.

Janet: They were on horse um hum wow.

Tom: Ah most of them were on horse there were some infantry there the Pennsylvania Bucktails they'd come down.

Janet: Um hum when was the last recorded skirmish or battle?

Tom: Ah let me see, I guess April 23, 1864 that was the last time Mosby attacked the Picket Post out there. Reverend Reed was shot after that, he was shot on October 18th.

Janet: Oh yes tell us more about Reverend Reed an interesting local character.

Tom: Yes, ah I don't know how I got onto that. A lady from way out in Arizona wrote me and said would you look into the Reverend John. E. Reed for me says his brother is buried out here and he was a minister, the one that was out there and strange enough he died broke and when they put up his tombstone they misspelled his name. They put it Reid, anyhow I said yes I'll look into this. So I made some inquiries around and talked to various people and found a picture of him, and went to the official records of the War of the Rebellion and it tells how he was captured and taken out. And how they put a pistol to the back of his head, and the powder burns. And

the servant that was with him lost an ear and played dead and escaped. And so that was how that came about. I think I wrote it up for the Fairfax Historical Society, my son and I wrote that one up.

Janet: Um hum.

Tom: And.

Janet: Why was he controversial?

Tom: He was a spy.

Janet: Oh, okay.

Tom: He was a spy and that was bad. And what was even bad is that the ORS (Office of Records Services) and in the ORS it says Mr. Reed knows where Mosby's headquarters is its six miles from here. Well it wasn't his headquarters it was Hunters Mill where he had the horses.

Janet: Oh.

Tom: And so they brought him out to Hunters Mill when they were - Montjoy I believe came up looking for horses and they ran into Reverend Reed and they took him along and then they shot him out at Hunters Mill.

Janet: Was he associated with a particular church in the area?

Tom: Yes the Second Baptist.

Janet: In Vienna?

Tom: No, Falls Church.

Janet: In Falls Church, okay, okay. I want to go back to some of the items that are in on of your display cases here. What are these things?

Tom: Well you know it's a straight razor and that's the one that the kids can never guess; they don't see that very often. This is a watch and chain.

Janet: Oh, you can actually see the works still of the watch, that's remarkable.

Tom: And this of course is pretty much the standard pocketknife that everybody had. This was the Jew's harp for music. This was a combination knife, fork and spoon set. So somebody kept the knife and fork and they lost their spoon. Harmonica I'm sure you recognize and this old brass thimble. You know you have to keep your uniform buttons sewn on.

Janet: Yes, so is that standard issue everybody got a needle, thread and a thimble or did their mama's give it to them before they left? (Both laughing)

Tom: They use to have a little square thing, a lot of Union soldiers did and it had needles and threads and things like that.

Janet: Great idea, I might take that idea and give it to my sons.

Tom: Boys had it.

Janet: Yeah. And then over here we have more buttons obviously, tell me again how you found this lovely diamond ring.

Tom: We were up at Oakton in the East 2nd Washington Artillery had been there at camp. They had come up from New Orleans and they had a lot of money and you don't find that later in the war. So I was going along and hit one of these bullets and then I hit the ring and hit the other bullet, they were just right in a straight line so they most certainly had fallen through the crack in the board floor of the tents.

Janet: What would they have made their tents out of? Were they a type of canvas?

Tom: They were a canvas.

Janet: But then they would build –

Tom: They would build a floor because they did not want to sleep on the ground.

Janet: Yeah, and so would they get the wood locally, I mean would they cut down a fence, a tree or?

Tom: No, they would take them out of somebody's house.

Janet: Oh, actual floorboards, I see, or wallboard I see.

Tom: If you had the choice otherwise they wouldn't.

Janet: These are such basic questions and you must be laughing when I ask them.

Tom: No, not at all.

Janet: But, what was the typical fare in terms of meals for these men in the Confederate and in the Federal Armies, what did they eat?

Tom: They were issued salt pork and hard tack. And in the firmly bitten bullets you see they would take these muskets that they'd fired buck and ball bullet and this buckshot was something they would take out the ball and they would use this like a shot gun. So I would say that rabbits, squirrels, groundhogs or anything that came by and of course farmers' cows and sheep and everything else you know. So they would supplement their rations.

Janet: And everything was basically cooked out over the open fire.

Tom: Yes.

Janet: And for example if you said Mrs. Brooks, was her name? Was known as a good cook in the area?

Tom: Yes, absolutely.

Janet: I mean would she be expected to make flapjacks or would men come to her and say we want you to cook cornbread for us if you've got cornmeal.

Tom: That's true and also lots of times they would bring it with them.

Janet: They would bring it with them and ask her to cook it then, very interesting.

Tom: Mosby himself would not bring it with him but when he left he always paid and that was why he had such a good reputation, he always paid for whatever he ate.

Janet: Was his family somewhere in the area?

Tom: No they were from Nelson County.

Janet: Nelson County, oh yes!

Tom: It was south.

Janet: South of Charlottesville then.

Tom: Um hum that area.

Janet: But he never went back there, or did he?

Tom: Well he visited there and he had a brother in that area.

Janet: After the war did he take his family with him when he changed careers and went on?

Tom: His wife died early when he was in Warrenton.

Janet: Oh, okay.

Tom: And so the family kind of split up so to speak.

Janet: Um hum. When you look back now to the time you said you've been a resident in the area for 33 years and of course at the time you moved here there were a lot of small, what I would call small horse farms and people like Linda Byrne who is with us today would have five or ten acres of land and horses and so forth. I would assume that at that point in time that it was a really good time to be looking for Civil War relics and such.

Tom: Oh yes.

Janet: Is that when most of these things were found?

Tom: Absolutely, now so much of this area is covered by subdivisions we've lost a lot of the gun positions out there. We still have a couple of trenches out there and the guys that are with me on the books here have back yards and have some huge excavations in their back yards, left over from the war.

Janet: And what kind of trenches were they, I mean were they for defense purposes?

Tom: Yes.

Janet: And how, I mean tell me what a trench would look like.

Tom: It is a mound of dirt about as wide as this table and maybe four or five feet high or something like that.

Janet: And they would be on the down on one of the sides and, I mean did, they use that just to disguise their location or did they use it as a place to fire from?

Tom: It was a place to fire from.

Janet: Okay.

Tom: Although I do not know if the ones in our area were used for that. We have up on Hawkes Ridge, where these guys live and I am pretty sure that this was flat and looked out over the area. And I think there was artillery up there, I'm pretty sure there was artillery up there. So these trenches were put down below the hills so incase anybody attacked the infantry would be down there.

Janet: Oh, I see.

Tom: Otherwise you wouldn't build a trench below.

Janet: Is that the area where a lookout tower was?

Tom: No that's at the corner across from the church. By the way I guess you noticed that nice little plaque out by the church there.

Janet: Yes on the Cartersville Church; so it was up that way. Is that one of the higher points in the area?

Tom: Yes it is.

Janet: It is hard to tell now when you drive around.

Tom: Yeah, but you can see Tyson's Corner from there. And Tyson's Corner had a huge tower up there where that radio tower is now.

Janet: Yes.

Tom: And that tied into downtown Washington, D.C., and so later they said that within 30 minutes

Janet: So it was a signal tower.

Tom: Back and forth, yeah um hum.

Janet: Amazing. Again, looking a little more to recent history how would you describe the efforts to document and preserve what you and others have researched and discovered through your own efforts. What has happened in the last say 10 to 15, 20 years' in terms of awareness to preserve some of these things?

Tom: Well of course right now we have the DVD and we have this book and I like to think we did our part in the 90's to get it all started. I have written quite a few articles about what had happened in our neighborhood and tried to document it but really there is so much of it and we are going to lose a lot of it. We've lost a lot of it and will lose more. But I think the main thing that we can do is to try to put up these signs that say this occurred here and I think that's the way we have to go.

Janet: And I know you've been asked to in part to help edit and comment on a walking tour for the area, is that right or I guess it would have to be a driving tour since Hunter Mill Road stretches about seven miles. But is that sort of an accumulation of the research that has been done over several decades and the people have pulled together so that one could go to one source and say Ah!! okay I can start at this point and work my way up the road and does it cover most of the strategic - what you would consider the key places to?

Tom: Yes, I think it does. It's all that we can find.

Janet: Is it a compendium of all that?

Tom: Next year somebody will find a dairy and there will be something in there. You can see this is in 92 and we've learned so much more. We learn

something every day. Somebody will find a love letter, or somebody will find a dairy.

Janet: Just in personal collections you're saying and things they might find in an attic or a stored -

Tom: Yes sort of.

Janet: What kinds of resources are in the Virginia Room of the Fairfax County Public Library?

Tom: Well, there is an awful lot in there. There's rosters of who were the Confederates and who fought all during the Civil War. And there's a tremendous amount of good stuff in the Virginia room. I transcribe things up there from time to time for research. But one of the biggest things that has come to us now is the personal computer. You can get on there and you can find so much stuff; it's just hard to say it's just a tremendous amount of stuff on there.

Janet: And have you ever had occasion to use the records that are available through the computer system down at the Manassas Museum for the Civil War Battlefield? I know there - I had the opportunity to discover that - my first, one of my great grandfathers was with the - had come over I think he took somebody's place in the war, he had come over from Scotland and that was the first thing he did he was 22 years old and signed up.

Tom: No, I haven't used their records down there; I use the ones in the Virginia room, particularly the old newspapers cause they have a wonderful collection of old newspapers in there that has a lot of good articles. I've been looking at obituaries of Mosby Rangers that died and actually, you know, I found out of lot of them have been buried on the computer. In Ohio and I found one in Texas so there is a lot of information.

Janet: After the war in looking back again just for my historiography point of view looking back at the materials that were available was there sort of a lack of interest in the subject in terms of actually collecting and beginning

to codify and write the history of the war? I mean at what point do you think – I mean there seems to be a sort of a real surge of interest currently at least in the local area about the significance of the area for the both the Federal and the Confederate sides. But looking back again because you've had a long career in this area when did - are there any notable periods in which there would seem to be renewed interest in trying to find out what happened, who was where and what happened?

Tom: Well immediately after the war the United Confederate Veterans set up and they had their magazines and they published all of this information and of course the North did the same with the GAR. And so we had all these veterans who as they died out it went down. Then of course when we had the 100 years Centennial then it all came out through there.

Janet: So that is the point at which there was a great deal - a resurgence of interest. And then I suppose with all the development that has taken place in areas around Richmond for example and certainly in Northern Virginia and Fairfax County in particular that perhaps there's been renewed interest in trying to document some of these things before the landscape is essentially reshaped. The topography has sometimes changed as a result of the development.

Tom: Yes when they built the new McDonald's down in Centerville which is what? six or seven years ago - as they were excavating they found I believe it was nine skeletons left over from the Civil War. They had been buried there right after the fighting and nobody had known it and of course all of the papers had a big thing there when they found them at the McDonald's. I think there is a lot of interest and unfortunately, I don't think we are getting the kids to read it as much so we thought the DVD would be better.

Janet: Right, right I know you said before the interview started that you really hoped that the recent DVD that had been made by yourself, Steve Hall and others would be used in the schools and certainly copies are available in our new local library. And I know one of the first exhibits at the library was your collection of artifacts.

Tom: Yes, we had part of it.

Janet: Part of it, yes the library is not big enough I am sure to house your collection but there was tremendous interest I happened to be over there for several Saturday's in a row after the library opened and everyone who walked in the door stopped and looked and spent ten or 15 minutes looking at the things that were on exhibit. And just were many of them were completely amazed that any of that was here.

Tom: Out in your back yards.

Janet: Yes, literally, literally, literally. (Both chuckling.) So, well, are there any other thoughts you'd like to share before we conclude the interview?

Tom: No, like I said I'm interested in historical preservation and we're going to have to give up a lot of things and that's the way it is. But, I would like to see more road signs and of course we've got a problem with those because those old roads are so dog gone narrow and the State makes you have to have a pull off where you can read the sign and we don't have much space to play with down on Hunters Mill Road. And I would like to see it keep its character as much as we can for as long as we can.

Janet: If you had one, or two or three sights along the road that you would give special priority or attention to in terms of preservation or documentation markers and so forth, what would they be?

Tom: Up by Miss Brooks house the Lida Brooks house and of course that was where Jeb Stewart had his first Calvary battle right in that area with the Pennsylvania troops. Down along the W&OD Trail we just have to have something in there because there are so many people who came through there. And then up on the right sits the old Millers house which goes back to the 1700's and that was General Meads headquarters when he was there.

Janet: The Brooks house and the old Millers house are in private hands at this point?

Tom: Yes they are – well ah Miss Brooks house unfortunately got bulldozed here about ten years ago but you can put up a sign that said to the left stood widow Brooks house. But no the old Millers house still stands; the new Millers house still stands and has been renovated.

Janet: And what is, is there any significance to the Christmas Tree Farm House? I forget what it's called now. It's up past if you are coming South to North it's up past the W&OD Trail but there is an older house that use to be called, I can't recall but on the left hand side of the road set back there is a white frame house that looks like it's at least I would say 1840's or 50's or 60's vintage.

Tom: I don't know but I'll tell you what their historic significance is, the Pickett Post there the Second Massachusetts Calvary picket post sat on that property looking right out over the railroad and Hunter Mill Road.

Janet: I see um hum. Okay.

Linda: The Hunter Mill Defense League did a video of that house Holly Town, I was the videographer and I am sorry I can't remember but there exists and I am sure there is a copy probably in the Virginia Room.

Tom: I haven't seen that video, I don't know how Holly did it but I have not seen that video.

Janet: It looks like there is a fairly sizeable lot still maybe four or five acres and so I have been curious about how they have been able to preserve it under the pressure of development in this area. I know when it came on the market maybe seven or eight years ago everyone was holding their breath to see is it going to go to a developer or be subdivided; but a family bought it with young children – fortunately in that respect.

Well thank you very, very much Mr. Evans this has been delightful. I have a feeling there maybe a follow up to this at one point.

Tom: Oh I'd be glad to I do like to talk I think we've got a couple of DVD showings coming up; and then I'm going to speak down in Warrenton this coming month and so I got to get around and talk a little bit.

Janet: Well I think we need to have the DVD have some more events at the library now that we have the community room to work with. I think obviously based on the crowd that turned out for the recent DVD that was introduced by Steve Hull and others that there is growing awareness and appreciation and curiosity and I would love to see us build on that.

Tom: We would to see that on Hunter Mill Road.

Janet: We are so grateful to you for being our local historian and archivist and curator of the relics and other artifacts that you've found. You have been a very important part of the effort and awareness.

Tom: I am please to do that because I think Hunters Mill Road needs to be preserved as much as we can and certainly more historical information put up where people can see it.

Janet: Well thank you very much.